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HELEN KELLER

A SECOND LAURA BRIDGMAN

BY

M. ANAGNOS

[REPRINTED FROM THE FIFTY-SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
PERKINS INSTITUTION AND MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND]



BOSTON
PRESS OF RAND AVERY COMPANY
1888

SOCIETY FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE BLIND
BOSTON

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HELEN KELLER.

A SECOND LAURA BRIDGMAN.

“ No iron so hard, but rust will fret it ;
No perch so high, but climbing will get it ;
Nothing so lost, but seeking will find it ;
No night so dark, but there is daylight behind it.”

THE discovery of ways and means for rescuing persons afflicted with combined blindness and deafness from the dread dungeon of deathlike darkness and stillness, and for enabling them to come into communion with the outer world, is one of the grandest achievements of the nineteenth century.

History has preserved the names of only a few members of the human family who have been doomed to that terrible state of mental and spiritual incarceration, which one of its more recent victims, Mr. Morrison Heady of Kentucky, delineates so pathetically in his most powerful and perfect poem, “The Double Night;” but there is no mention of any serious attempts having ever been made to teach them systematic language as a means of intercourse with their fellows. The ideas expressed on the subject by the renowned Abbé de l’Epée in his learned speculations were merely vague theories, which had no

foundation in fact and were never confirmed by practical tests.

It was just fifty years last autumn since the popular heart of this country first went out in sympathy toward Laura Bridgman in her dreadful affliction. Attacked early in childhood by that dire disease, scarlet fever in a malignant form, she was shorn of the senses of sight and hearing, taste and smell, and was left in a most deplorable condition. For five months she lay in a darkened room. After long suffering she began to rally. She improved slowly, and two years had passed before her health was fully restored; but her mind was shut up by what appeared to be an impenetrable wall. Her deprivations were simply appalling. She was left with the meagre equipment of touch as her sole means with which to find her way into the world of thought, speech and light. Benevolent persons, amazed at the immensity of her calamity, asked, "Who will free this imprisoned soul? Who will bridge the chasm which separates this isolated spirit from her kind?" In the midst of general silence the illustrious founder of this institution answered, "I will try;" and hastened to Hanover, New Hampshire, to ascertain the facts in the case and induce the parents of the little girl to send her to Boston and place her under his care.

Dr. Howe was by constitution a champion of freedom, by impulse a philanthropist, and by genius and purpose a reformer. Like many another gallant worker in the world he had the soldier spirit with



DR. HOWE TEACHING LAURA BRIDGMAN.

the savior intent — and the love of adventure as well. He was the very man to go out as an apostle of liberation. He entered upon the task of piercing a trackless forest and purveying mental pabulum to the starving mind of Laura with undaunted courage

and indomitable will. He had no precedent to follow, no indices to be guided by. But he was determined to succeed. In his estimate, obstacles of whatever magnitude were only "things to be overcome," and nothing more. He was confident that his little pupil possessed the desire and capacity for acquiring a complete arbitrary language, and resolved to enable her to do so. Perseverance, skill, sagacity, ingenuity and in fact all the resources of his fertile brain and the forces of his unbending will were brought to bear upon this point. Finally, after numberless trials and heroic efforts for weeks and months, the first and most important step was taken. Laura was made to understand that all things have names which can be expressed by complex signs or letters embossed on paper or formed by the fingers. Thus a grand victory was won. The means were discovered for reaching the human soul in its saddest and completest imprisonment. A new jewel was added to the crown of philanthropy; and the name of Dr. Howe was engraved on the golden tablets on which are inscribed the names of the benefactors of mankind.

Laura's happy deliverance from so fearful an entombment became widely known all over the civilized world, and was hailed with great delight and universal wonder. Philosophers and thinkers of both Europe and America have made it the subject of much profound thought and serious comment. Titled nobles, nay, even crowned heads, have confessed

the merit of this marvellous achievement, and have bowed in homage to the noble spirit of the deed. The royalty of genius, culture and goodness — too princely for coronet, diadem, or any badge of distinction — has rendered its tribute of praise; and the devotees of the science of education have found a mine of study and suggestion in this extraordinary case.

The achievement of Dr. Howe, like a column of holy fire, blazed upon the pathway and indicated the course to be traversed by his successors. The methods and processes employed in Laura's case were soon applied to that of Oliver Caswell and proved to be most efficacious. They have since become standard and are now used on both hemispheres with great success.

“ All can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed.”

After the glorious discovery of Christopher Columbus the Atlantic Ocean became a common thoroughfare.

During the past twenty-five years the number of persons bereft of the senses of sight and hearing has increased in both Europe and America. Sporadic cases are found almost everywhere, but by far the largest proportionate number of them is scattered among the rural population of Sweden. Reliable statistics show that there are from thirty to thirty-five sufferers of this class in that country.

A benevolent lady, Madame Elizabeth Anrep Nordin, has taken a most profound interest in the welfare of these hapless human beings ; she has called the attention of the royal family to their existence and condition, and through its influence has induced the government to bring the matter before the parliament and obtain the legislation necessary to secure a special provision for their care and training. Aided by a religious society, she came to this country about twenty months ago, visited the institutions for the deaf and those for the blind in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Hartford, Northampton and Boston, and spent several weeks under our roof studying the case of Laura Bridgman and every incident connected with it. On her return home to Skara, Sweden, — where her husband is the principal of an establishment for deaf-mutes, — she organized a little school and commenced work with five pupils. Owing to the lack of sufficient pecuniary means this most beneficent enterprise is not making as rapid progress as we earnestly desire.

The last census of the United States does not give the exact number of persons afflicted with the loss of two or more senses, but it is safe to state that there cannot be fewer than forty. About one dozen of these have been or are now under instruction in various schools for the deaf or for the blind.

The case of JAMES H. CATON has been known for a

number of years. We have still in our possession a few lines of autobiography, which he wrote for us on a type-writer in 1880, soon after Garfield's election. He was graduated from the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in June last and delivered the salutatory address.

AGNES O'CONNOR has been in the Illinois Institution for the Deaf and Dumb since last winter. She was taken there by the superintendent, Dr. Gillett, who had found her in the Cook county almshouse, and was placed under the immediate supervision and tuition of his niece, Miss Jane V. Gillett. The exact age of the unfortunate girl is not known, but she is not far from her fifteenth year. Dr. Gillett has spared no pains in directing her education, and she is making very satisfactory progress.

ALBERT A. NOLEN of Salem, Massachusetts, was admitted to the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb at Hartford, Oct. 14, 1886, at the age of twelve years. The principal of that institution, Prof. Job Williams, assigned the task of introducing him to a knowledge of words to one of his most competent teachers, Miss Kate C. Camp, and has himself taken a deep interest in devising or providing means to facilitate her work. During a brief visit which I made last February in Hartford I had an opportunity of witnessing the processes employed in the training of this lad and of seeing the progress he was making, and it is with

great pleasure that I bear testimony to the excellence of both the methods and the results.

Mr. Frank Battles, acting principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind in Philadelphia, has among his pupils three who are both deaf and sightless. Their names and ages are as follows:—
WILLIAM A. MILLER, born in England Dec. 30, 1871, lost his sight at eleven years of age; MARTHA MOREHOUSE, born in New Jersey Sept. 2, 1866; KATHARINE A. W. PARRY, born in England July 20, 1872, lost her sight at seven years of age, but sees enough to distinguish color and objects plainly. They all retain the power of speech, having lost the sense of hearing after they had learned to talk. They are taught by means of the single-hand manual alphabet used by the deaf and are making satisfactory progress both in their studies and in various handicrafts.

EDITH M. THOMAS was admitted to the kindergarten for the blind connected with this institution several weeks ago, and one of our graduates, Miss Lilian May Fletcher, was engaged as her special teacher, and has already taken successfully the first steps in opening to her the mysteries of language.

But of all the blind and deaf-mute children who are under instruction HELEN KELLER of Tuscumbia, Alabama, is undoubtedly the most remarkable. It is no hyperbole to say that she is a phenomenon. History presents no case like hers. In many re-

spects, such as intellectual alertness, keenness of observation, eagerness for information, and in brightness and vivacity of temperament she is unquestionably equal to Laura Bridgman; while in quickness of perception, grasp of ideas, breadth of comprehension, insatiate thirst for solid knowledge, self-reliance and sweetness of disposition she certainly excels her prototype.

Helen was born June 27, 1880, with all her faculties. At the age of about nineteen months she had a violent attack of congestion of the stomach, and this illness resulted in total loss of sight and hearing. On the 15th of July, 1886, her father, Capt. Arthur H. Keller, wrote me a letter, giving me a brief account of the deprivations as well as of the mental activity of his little daughter, and asking me whether I could procure a competent teacher for her. I responded in the affirmative, and my thoughts were almost instinctively turned towards Miss Annie M. Sullivan. She had just graduated from our school, where she had stood at the head of her class, and her valedictory address — a beautiful original production, teeming with felicitous thoughts clothed in a graceful style — was a revelation even to those who were acquainted with her uncommon powers. After due deliberation I decided to make known to Miss Sullivan the contents of Capt. Keller's letter and to inform her that the position would be open to her provided she could fit herself for its requirements.

She replied that she would try, and began immediately the work of preparation with great earnestness and unremitting application. She studied Laura Bridgman's case thoroughly in all its phases, perused voluminous books on mental development, read the reports of Dr. Howe with assiduous care, mastered his methods and processes in their minutest details, and drank copiously of his noble spirit and of the abundance of his faith in the efficacy of human capacities and innate powers for redemption and improvement. Having become convinced by actual observation that she was well equipped for her work and absolutely competent to take charge of the little girl, I wrote again to Capt. Keller, recommending her most highly and without any reservation. In consequence of this correspondence liberal terms were offered, an agreement was readily effected, and my dear friend and former pupil started for Alabama the last week in February.

On entering upon her work Miss Sullivan was struck with the extraordinary intelligence and remarkable aptitude of her little pupil. She commenced to give her instruction, and chose for the object of the first lesson a beautiful doll which had just been sent to the child from Boston and for which she seemed to cherish a warm maternal attachment. For obvious reasons, the greatest difficulty and most perplexing part of the task of introducing blind and deaf-mute persons to the mysteries



MISS SULLIVAN TEACHING HELEN KELLER.

of language is to make them understand that all objects have names which can be expressed by arbitrary signs. This is the principal and most important part in the whole undertaking. As the

French say, it is the first step that counts more than anything else.

“C’est le premier pas qui coûte.”

When this is accomplished all else goes well, and success is assured. Now, in looking over the record of every known case, we find that this starting point, this initiative step has invariably been slow, tardy, uncertain, and not infrequently vexatious. It was nearly three months before Laura Bridgman — the brightest and quickest of them all — caught the idea. It was not so with Helen. The thought flashed across her marvellous brain as soon as it was transmitted to it by one of its “lackeys or scullions,” the sense of touch. In three lessons she perceived, clearly and distinctly, that words stood for objects; and in less than a week’s time she was in possession of the mystery of this relation in the fulness of its meaning, and became mistress of the whole situation. As if impelled by a resistless instinctive force she snatched the key of the treasury of the English language from the fingers of her teacher, unlocked its doors with vehemence, and began to feast on its contents with inexpressible delight. As soon as a slight crevice was opened in the outer wall of their twofold imprisonment, her mental faculties emerged full-armed from their living tomb as Pallas Athene sprang from the head of Zeus. Her thoughts, long suppressed for the want of adequate means for expression, —

“Burst their confinement with impetuous sway.”

In illustration of the wonderful mental activity and the rapid development of this remarkable child, and as showing also some of the prominent traits of her character, the following extracts are taken from Miss Sullivan's letters : —

MAY 2, 1887. — Helen is truly a wonderful child. It seems to me that one with all her senses could not have accomplished any more than she has done in these three months, — indeed, it is not yet quite three months since she began. She knows almost three hundred words and is learning five or six a day. Their length does not seem to make any difference to her. One day she pointed to the railing of the stairs and wanted me to give her the name for it. I spelled *balustrade* to her two or three times. Two days afterward I thought I would see if she remembered any of the letters, when, to my surprise, she spelled the word without a mistake ; and such words as *ice-cream*, *strawberry*, *raspberry*, and *rocking-chair* she learns as readily as words of two letters.

I never have to spell a proper name to her but once. The name of the gentleman who is boarding with us is Mr. Goodnow, and Helen always calls him by it. I suppose Laura's instructors did not teach her titles, because they thought she would not perceive the difference between the name and the title, but I have made Helen pause after *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, or *Uncle*, as the case may be, and when she is a little farther advanced I can very easily explain this to her.

She sits for an hour or two every day finding the words she knows in her books, and whenever she comes to one she screams with delight. I can now tell her to go up stairs or down, to go into the hall or room, to lock or unlock the door, to sit or stand, walk or run, lie or creep, and she understands me. Whenever I give her a new word, especially a word expressing action, like *hop* or *jump*, or any of those already mentioned, she throws her arms around me and kisses me.

JUNE 19. — My little pupil continues to manifest the same eagerness to learn as at first. Every waking moment is spent in the endeavor to satisfy her innate desire for knowledge, and her mind works so incessantly that we have feared for her health. But her appetite, which left her a few weeks ago, has returned, and her sleep seems more quiet and natural. She will be seven years old the 27th of this month. Her height is four feet, one inch, and her head measures twenty inches in circumference, the line being drawn around the head so as to pass over the prominences of the parietal and frontal bones. Above this line the head rises one and one-fourth inches.

During our walks she keeps up a continual spelling, and delights to accompany it with actions such as skipping, hopping, jumping, running, walking fast, walking slow, and the like. When she drops stitches she says, "Helen wrong, teacher will cry." If she wants water she says, "Give Helen drink water." She knows four hundred words besides numerous proper nouns. In one lesson I taught her these words, — *bedstead, mattress, sheet, blanket, comforter, spread, pillow*. The next day I found that she remembered all but *spread*. The same day she had learned, at different times, the words, *house, weed, dust, swing, molasses, fast, slow, maple-sugar* and *counter*, and she had not forgotten one of these last. This will give you an idea of the retentive memory she possesses. She can count to thirty very quickly, and can write seven of the square hand letters and the words which can be made with them. She seems to understand about writing letters and is impatient to "write Frank letter." She enjoys punching holes in paper with the stiletto and I supposed it was because she could examine the result of her work; but we watched her one day, and I was much surprised to find that she imagined she was writing a letter. She would spell "Eva" (a cousin of whom she is very fond) with one hand, then make believe write it; then spell "sick in bed," and write that. She kept this up for nearly an hour. She was (or imagined she was) putting on paper the things which had

interested her. When she had finished she carried it to her mother and spelled, "Frank letter," and gave it to her brother to take to the post office. She has been with me to take letters to the post office.

She recognizes instantly a person whom she has once met, and spells the name. Unlike Laura, she is fond of gentlemen, and we notice that she makes friends with a gentleman sooner than with a lady.

There is seldom a cloud seen upon her face and we observe that it grows brighter every day. She is always ready to share whatever she has with those about her, often keeping but very little for herself. She is very fond of dress and of all kinds of finery, and is very unhappy when she finds a hole in any thing she is wearing. She will insist on having her hair put in curl papers when she is so sleepy she can scarcely stand. She discovered a hole in her boot the other morning, and, after breakfast, she went to her father and spelled, "Helen new boot Simpson" (her brother) "buggy store man." One can easily see her meaning.

In farther illustration of her love of dress I quote from a letter of earlier date: —

Have I told you that Helen has a great notion of "primping"? Nothing pleases her better than to be dressed in her best clothes. The other day I told her to put her hat on and I would take her to walk. I was changing my dress at the time and I suppose Helen thought I was dressing up. She went down-stairs in a great hurry, and showed her mother that she wanted her best dress on. Mrs. Keller paid no attention to her. Hence she decided to fix herself. When I called for her I found the most comical looking child imaginable. She had wet her hair until the water was running in little streams in all directions, and if it did not look sleek nothing ever did. She had found her father's hair-oil and put no small quantity of that on as a "finishing touch." Then she had oiled her face. She

had seen people put glycerine on their faces and she probably thought they did it for the sake of appearance. Then she took the baby's powder, and applied that in small patches, so that she looked like a little darkey with a white eruption. When she had completed her toilet to her own satisfaction she came for her mother's approval with such a self-satisfied air. Of course she found us both laughing as if we would die. You never saw any one look so comical. I assure you we had hard work to make her dress according to our ideas.

In the course of four months Helen mastered more than four hundred and fifty common words — nouns, verbs transitive and intransitive, adjectives and prepositions — which she could use correctly and spell with perfect accuracy. At the same time she learned to read raised characters with the tips of her fingers almost spontaneously and with very little effort on the part of her instructress, to converse freely by means of the manual alphabet, to cipher, to write a neat “square hand,” and to express her elementary ideas in correct composition. In brief, the total sum of the knowledge which she acquired in four months exceeds that which Laura Bridgman obtained in more than two years. This may seem a fabulous or extravagant statement, but the following autograph *fac-simile* copy of the first letter which she wrote to her mother, July 12, 1887, while on a short visit at Huntsville, — reproduced on a smaller size than the original merely in order to fit the width of the page but without the slightest ad-

dition or alteration, — leaves not a shadow of doubt
on this point: —

helen will write mother
letter papa did give hel-
en medicine mil dred
will sit in swing
mildred will kiss
helen teachers did give
helen peach
young q is sick in
bed george and m. hunt
anna did give helen
lemonade dog did
stand up.
conductor did punch
ticket papa did give
helen drink of water
in car

can lotta did give helen
flowers anna will buy
helen pretty new hat
helen will hug and kiss
mother helen will come
home and mother does
love helen

good-by

This letter, compared with the first one which Laura Bridgman wrote to her mother in 1839 when she was ten years of age, and of which Dr. Howe preserved an autograph *fac-simile* in the eighth annual report of this institution, is superior in every respect.

On her return to Tuscumbia from her visit to Huntsville, Helen wrote a long letter to her cousin George, giving him a minute account of everything that occurred on her way home. She speaks of her meeting in the steam-cars a kind lady, who gave her a drink of water but who "did talk wrong on fingers."

Epistolography amounts almost to a passion with Helen. Last September, having been told by her teacher that our little blind girls had just come back to school after the summer vacation, she sent them a note of friendly remembrance and sisterly greeting. This letter was written without assistance on the 29th of that month, and as it furnishes a more striking and tangible proof than mere descriptions and verbal statements can afford of the astonishing progress which this remarkable child is making with amazing rapidity, I insert here an autograph *fac-simile* copy of it, differing only in size from the original: —

Helen will write little
blind girls a letter
Helen and teacher will come

to see little blind girls
 Helen and teacher will go in
 steam car to Boston Helen
 and blind girls will have
 fun blind girls can talk on
 fingers Helen will see many
 nos men anagnos will love
 and kiss Helen Helen will go
 to school with blind girls
 Helen can read and count and
 spell and write like blind
 girls Mildred will not go to
 Boston Mildred does cry
 hince and jumbo will go to
 Boston papa does shoot ducks
 with gun and ducks do fall in
 water and jumbo and marnie
 do swim in water and bring ducks
 out in mouth to papa Helen does
 play with dogs Helen does ride
 on horseback with teacher Helen
 does give hindee grass in hand
 teacher does whip hindee to go
 fast Helen is tired Helen will
 put letter in envelope for blind
 girls good-bye
 Helen Helen

In chirography and grasp of ideas, as well as in variety of subjects and fluency of expression, this epistle is a decided improvement upon that which she wrote to her mother. Our girls received it with great joy and read it with sincere admiration. They immediately set to work to prepare an answer and forwarded it with a little desk as a token of their love and good will. In acknowledgment of this gift Helen wrote a most characteristic letter, dated Oct. 24, 1887, of which the following is a *fac-simile*: —

dear little blind girls
 I will write you a letter
 I thank you for pretty desk
 I did write to mother in Memphis on
 its mother and Mildred came home
 Wednesday mother brought me
 a pretty new dress and hat papa
 did go to Huntsville he brought me
 apples and candy I and teacher
 will come to Boston and see you
 Nancy is my doll she does say
 I do rock Nancy to sleep Mildred
 is sick doctor will give her
 medicine to make her well. I and
 teacher did go to church Sunday
 Mr. Lane did read in book and talk
 lady did play on organ. I did
 give man money in basket.

I will be good girl and teacher will
 curl my hair lovely. I will hug and
 kiss little blind girls m. an agnos
 will come to see me.

good-bye
 HELEN KELLER.

That the little witch could, in the course of twenty-five days, make such strides in the acquisition of language and the enlargement of her vocabulary, as are indicated by this letter, seems almost incredible. Yet the evidence before us is so clear and conclusive that it does not leave room for the slightest doubt. Pronouns are undoubtedly the most difficult part of speech for children to learn to use correctly, and Helen's employment of them is one of the most noticeable features of her last composition. Upon this significant gain, as well as on Helen's speedy general improvement, Miss Sullivan dwells with emphasis in a letter, which she addressed to me a few days later and from which I take the liberty of copying the following extract: —

You have probably read, ere this, Helen's second letter to the little girls. I am aware that the progress which she has made between the writing of the two letters must seem incredible. Only those who are with her daily can realize the rapid advancement which she is making in the acquisition of language. You will see from her letter that she uses many of the most difficult pronouns correctly. She rarely misuses or omits one in

conversation. Her passion for writing letters and putting her thoughts upon paper grows more intense. She now tells stories in which the imagination plays an important part. She is also beginning to realize that she is not like other children. The other day she asked, "What do my eyes do?" I told her that I could see things with my eyes, and that she could see them with her fingers. After thinking a moment she said, "My eyes are bad!" then she changed it into "My eyes are sick!" What a blessing it is that she will never realize fully the magnitude of her loss!

To my perfect delight, while I was arranging the materials for this imperfect sketch, I was myself favored with a charming letter from Helen, of which I could not resist the temptation to publish the following *fac-simile* as an additional illustration of her marvellous progress:—

dear mr. anagnos I will
write you a letter. I and
teacher did have picture.
teacher will send it to
you. photographer does
make pictures. carpenter
does build new houses.
gardener does dig and hoe
ground and plant vegetables.
my doll nancy is sleeping.
she is sick. milne d is well
uncle frank has gone hunt-
ing deer. we will have
venison for breakfast when

he comes home. I did hide in
 wheel barrow and teacher
 did push it. Simpson did
 give me popcorn and wal-
 nuts. cousin nora has gone
 to see her mother. people
 do go to church Sunday.
 I did read in my book
 about fox and box. fox can
 sit in the box. I do like
 to read in my book. you
 do love me. I do love you.

good by
 Helen Keller.

These letters, printed in chronological order, are sufficient in themselves without comment or explanation to show that their tiny author is a most extraordinary little individual. Indeed, she is a mental prodigy, an intellectual phenomenon. In view of all the circumstances her achievements are little short of a miracle. It would be extremely difficult, nay impossible, to find a child in full possession of his faculties who could accomplish, in six or seven months, more than Helen has done. Access to her doubly imprisoned mind was gained so speedily that it seemed almost like a touch of witchcraft. Her intellectual faculties bloomed into fragrant flowers as soon as

a breath of the warm spring air from the external world entered their rayless and dreary incasement. Her progress was not a gradual advancement but a sort of triumphal march, — a series of dazzling conquests. The innate desire for knowledge and the instinctive efforts which the human faculties make to exercise their functions are shown as remarkably in Helen's case as they were in Laura's.

The case of this child is unique and of absorbing interest in every respect. So far as I know it is the only one in existence which promises to throw important light upon such psychological questions as were not exhaustively investigated by Dr. Howe, on account of the biasing influence which bigoted and fanatical zealots brought to bear upon the mind of his pupil during the process of his work. Let us hope that both science and humanity will profit by the present opportunity to the fullest extent.

But, remarkable and unparalleled as is Helen's case, that of her teacher is, in some points, no less noteworthy. Miss Sullivan entered our school Oct. 7, 1880, at the age of sixteen years. Her sight was so seriously impaired as to justify her classification with the blind. The circumstances of her early life were very inauspicious. She was neither rocked in a cradle lined with satin and supplied with down cushions, nor brought up on the lap of luxury. On the contrary, her experiences in childhood and youth

were of a most distressing character. But it should be remembered that it is adversity rather than prosperity which stimulates the perseverance of strong, healthy natures, rouses their energy and develops their powers. This was precisely the case with Miss Sullivan. When she was admitted to this institution her stock of information was painfully meagre. Her blindness cut her entirely off from all advantages; but even before the obscuration of her vision her struggle for the means of existence had been so constant as to preclude all possibility of her acquiring the rudiments of knowledge. Hence she was obliged to begin her education from the lowest and most elementary point; but she showed from the very start that she had in herself the force and capacity which insure success. The furnace of hardships through which she passed was not without beneficent results. It freed the pure gold of her nature from all dross. For, as Byron puts it, —

“ The rugged metal of the mine
Must burn before its surface shine.”

An iron will was hammered out upon the anvil of misfortune. Miss Sullivan was not very long under systematic instruction before she gave unmistakable evidences of the depth, the steadfastness and the beauty of her character. She spared no pains to remedy the defects and to fill out the gaps in her training. She toiled, in season and out of season, to overcome obstacles. She was determined to climb

to the top of the ladder, and used uncommon industry, perseverance and resolution as steps for the ascent. She has finally reached the goal for which she strove so bravely. The golden words that Dr. Howe uttered and the example that he left passed into her thoughts and heart and helped her on the road of usefulness; and now she stands by his side as his worthy successor in one of the most cherished branches of his work, carrying it on in a most satisfactory manner and receiving the benediction of his spirit.

“ Delightful task, to rear the tender thought,
 To teach the young idea how to shoot,
 To pour the fresh instruction o’er the mind,
 To breathe the enlivening spirit, and to fix
 The generous purpose in the glowing breast ! ”

Miss Sullivan’s talents are of the highest order. In breadth of intellect, in opulence of mental power, in fertility of resource, in originality of device and in practical sagacity she stands in the front rank. Only one of Dr. Howe’s assistants, Miss Wight (afterward Mrs. Edward Bond), could vie with her in these respects; and a great pity it was that Laura was not placed under the broad, quickening, and vitalizing influence of this most excellent woman at an earlier stage of her education, when her mind was more plastic and susceptible to lasting impressions of generous views and liberal ideas.

Miss Sullivan is truly an honor to the graduates

of this institution. Her intelligence, vivified by earnestness and colored by a high sense of self-respect, is conspicuous. By proper treatment and skilful surgical operations the thick opaqueness of her eyes was converted into translucency, and now she is able to read and write with but very little difficulty. Her personality is marked and positive. The story of her life is one of high endeavor and grand achievement. Helen's rescue from the abyss of darkness and stillness is the crown of her work. She undertook the task with becoming modesty and diffidence, and accomplished it alone, quietly and unostentatiously. She had no coadjutors in it, and there will therefore be no plausible opportunity for any one to claim a share in the origin of the architectural design of the magnificent structure, because he or she was employed as helper to participate in the execution of the plan.

At my urgent request Miss Sullivan prepared a brief account of Helen's life and education, which is an admirable specimen of terse, clear, cogent statement of facts and of conclusions based thereon. Here is the tale as told in her own words : —

HELEN ADAMS KELLER, daughter of Arthur H. and Kate Keller, was born June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

Her father was formerly editor of the "North Alabamian," an old, influential and well-known journal, and is now United States marshal for the northern district of Alabama. Mr. Arthur H. Keller's father was a native of Switzerland, who came to America before the revolution and settled in Maryland.

His mother, Mary F. Keller, was born in Rockbridge, Virginia. Her maiden name was Moore, and she was a great granddaughter of Alexander Spotswood, the first colonial governor of that State, and the founder of the order of the "Knights of the Golden Horse Shoe." She was also second cousin to General Robert E. Lee.

Helen's mother is a daughter of the late General Charles W. Adams of Memphis, Tennessee, a distinguished lawyer, and a brigadier general in the confederate army. He was a native of Boston, Massachusetts, but moved to the south when quite a young man. Mrs. Keller's mother was an Everett, and her grandparents on her mother's side were also from the north.

When Helen was about nineteen months old, she was attacked violently with congestion of the stomach; and this illness resulted in total loss of sight and hearing. Previously she had enjoyed perfect health, and is said to have been an unusually bright and active child. She had learned to walk, and was fast learning to talk.

During this sickness her life hung in the balance for several days, and after recovery there was no evidence for some time of any injury to her eyes, except a red and inflamed appearance. The terrible truth soon dawned upon her parents, however. They tried every available avenue of relief, carrying her to the best specialists of the day, from none of whom, however, did they receive the slightest hope of her restoration to sight or hearing. For many months her eyes were very painful and she buried them in the bed-clothes away from the light. Soon she ceased to talk, because she had ceased to hear any sound.

But her busy brain was not idle. Her mind was bright and clear. As her physical strength returned she began to exhibit wonderful aptitude for learning everything about the economy of the household. She also learned to distinguish the different members of the family and of her acquaintance, and became familiar with their features through the sense of touch.

As her mother went about her daily household duties Helen

was always by her side. Her little hands felt of every object and detected every movement. Then she began to imitate the motions of those around her, and to express her wants, and many of her thoughts, by signs. Both her power of imitation and her ability to express herself by means of natural signs were developed to a remarkable degree.

Her parents finally became convinced that there was no possibility of Helen's regaining either sight or hearing, and on March 2, 1887, I became her teacher.

I found her a bright, active, well-grown girl, with a clear and healthful complexion and pretty brown hair. She was quick and graceful in her movements, having fortunately not acquired any of those nervous habits so common among the blind. She has a merry laugh and is fond of romping with other children. Indeed she is never sad, but has the gayety which belongs to her age and temperament. When alone she is restless and always flits from place to place as if searching for something or somebody.

Her sense of touch is so acute that a slight contact enables her to recognize her associates. She can even distinguish readily between puppies of the same litter, and will spell the name of each as soon as she touches him. So nice is her sense of smell that she will recognize different roses by their fragrance; and by the same sense she can separate her own clothes from those which belong to others. Equally perfect is her sense of taste.

She inherited a quick temper and an obstinate will, and owing to her deprivations neither had ever been subdued or directed. She would often give way to violent paroxysms of anger when she had striven in vain to express intelligibly some idea. As soon, however, as she learned to use the finger alphabet these outbursts ceased, and now she seldom loses her temper. Her disposition is sweet and gentle, and she is remarkably affectionate and demonstrative. She frequently leaves work or play to caress those near her and likes to kiss all her friends. If she is

conscious of having displeased any one she is not satisfied until she makes her peace with a kiss. She is never irritable or fretful, and no longer cries from vexation or disappointment. Seldom will physical pain draw tears from her eyes; but she will discover quickly if a friend is hurt or ill, or grieved by her own conduct, and this knowledge makes her weep freely.

Her fondness for dress and finery is as noticeable as that of any seeing child. She is happiest when she has on her best dresses, and she spends much time over her toilet. She learned with astonishing readiness to conduct herself properly at the table, to be neat and orderly about her person, and to be correct in her deportment. When I had been with her long enough for intimate mutual acquaintance, I took her one morning to the school-room and began her first lesson. She had a beautiful doll which had been sent her from Boston, and I had chosen it for the object of this lesson. When her curiosity concerning it was satisfied, and she sat quietly holding it, I took her hand and passed it over the doll. Then I made the letters *d-o-l-l* slowly with the finger alphabet, she holding my hand and feeling the motions of my fingers. I began to make the letters the second time. She immediately dropped the doll and followed the motions of my fingers with one hand while she repeated the letters with the other. She next tried to spell the word without assistance, though rather awkwardly. She did not give the double “l”, and so I spelled the word once more, laying stress on the repeated letter. She then spelled *doll* correctly. This process was repeated with other words, and Helen soon learned six words, *doll*, *hat*, *mug*, *pin*, *cup*, *ball*. When given one of these objects she would spell its name, but it was more than a week before she understood that all things were thus identified.

She would manifest pleasure when told the name of a new object, and was always delighted to receive a pat of approval.

One day I took her to the cistern. As the water gushed from the pump, I spelled *w-a-t-e-r*. Instantly she tapped my

hand for a repetition, and then made the word herself with a radiant face. Just then the nurse came into the cistern-house bringing her little sister. I put Helen's hand on the baby and formed the letters *b-a-b-y*, which she repeated without help and with the light of a new intelligence beaming from her expressive features.

On our way back to the house everything she touched had to be named to her and repetition was seldom necessary. Neither the length of the word nor the combination of letters seem to make any difference to the child. Indeed she remembers *heliotrope* and *chrysanthemum* more readily than she does shorter names.

Helen now understood that everything had a name and that by placing the fingers in certain positions we could communicate these names to each other. Since that day my method of teaching her has been to let her examine an object carefully and then give her its name with my fingers. Never did a child apply herself more joyfully to any task than did Helen to the acquisition of new words. In a few days she had mastered the manual alphabet, and learned upwards of a hundred names. At the end of August she knew six hundred and twenty-five words.

At first it was necessary to use a great many signs in conversation with her; but these were laid aside as soon as the better medium of communication was established.

Next I taught her the verbs, beginning with *sit*, *stand*, *shut*, *open*. As the spelling of each word was accompanied by the action it represented she soon caught its meaning, and almost immediately used it in forming sentences. The verb *give* was troublesome, but she mastered it in a few days.

This lesson was followed with one on words indicative of place relations. Her dress was put *in* a trunk, and then *on* it, and these prepositions were spelled for her. Very soon she learned the difference between *on* and *in*, though it was some time before she could use these words in sentences of her own.

Whenever it was possible she was made the actor in the lesson, and was delighted to stand *on* the chair, and to be put *into* the wardrobe. In this way she learned the force of these words more quickly than she could have done with the use of a box and ring. In connection with this lesson she learned the names of the members of the family and the word *is*. “Helen is in wardrobe,” “Mildred is in crib,” “Box is on table,” “Papa is on bed,” are specimens of sentences constructed by the child during the latter part of April.

Next came a lesson on words expressive of positive quality. For the first lesson I had two balls, one made of worsted, large and soft, the other a bullet. She perceived the difference in size at once. Taking the bullet she made her habitual sign for *small*, — that is, by pinching a little bit of the skin of one hand. Then she took the other ball and made her sign for *large* by spreading both hands over it. I substituted the adjectives *large* and *small* for these signs. Then her attention was called to the hardness of the one ball and the softness of the other, and so she learned *soft* and *hard*. A few minutes afterwards she felt of her little sister’s head and said to her mother, “Mildred’s head is small and hard.” Next I tried to teach her the meaning of *fast* and *slow*. She helped me wind some worsted one day, first rapidly and afterward slowly. I then said to her with the finger alphabet, “wind fast,” or “wind slow,” holding her hands and showing her how to do as I wished. The next day while exercising she spelled to me, “Helen wind fast,” and began to walk rapidly. Then she said, “Helen wind slow,” again suiting the action to the words.

May-day she came to me and said, “give Helen key open door;” I then taught her the word *will* and she learned at once to say, “give Helen key and Helen will open door.” I had tried a few mornings before to make her understand the use of the conjunction *and*, which she now supplies of her own accord.

She often surprises me in this way. When I think I have failed to make something plain to her and conclude to await

another opportunity she anticipates me and shows me that she has already caught my meaning. I now thought it time to teach her to read printed words. A slip on which was printed, in raised letters, the word *box* was placed on that object; and the same experiment was tried with a great many articles, but she did not immediately comprehend that the label-name represented the thing. Then I took an alphabet sheet and put her finger on the letter A, at the same time making A with my fingers. She moved her finger from one printed character to another as I formed each letter on my fingers. Incredible as it may seem, she learned all the letters, both capital and small, in one day. Next I turned to the first page of the Primer and made her touch the word *cat*, spelling it on my fingers at the same time. Instantly she caught the idea, and asked me to find *dog* and many other words. Indeed she was much displeased because I could not find her name in the book. Just then I had no sentences in raised letters which she could understand, all of them being for more advanced pupils; but she would sit for hours feeling of each word in her book. When she touched one with which she was familiar a peculiarly sweet expression would light up her face, and we saw her countenance growing sweeter and more earnest every day. About this time I sent a list of the words she knew to Mr. Anagnos and he very kindly had them printed for her. Her mother and I cut up several sheets of printed words so that she could arrange them into sentences. This delighted her more than anything she had yet done; and the practice thus obtained prepared the way for the writing lessons. There was no difficulty in making her understand how to write the same sentences with pencil and paper which she made every day with the slips, and she very soon perceived that she need not confine herself to phrases already learned but could communicate any thought that was passing through her mind. I put one of the writing boards used by the blind between the folds of the paper on the table, and allowed her to examine an alphabet of the square letters,

such as she was to make. I then guided her hand so as to form the sentence, "cat does drink milk." When she finished it she was overjoyed. She carried it to her mother, who spelled it to Helen as she read it. The child could scarcely restrain her excitement and joy as each word was thus repeated to her.

Day after day she moved her pencil in the same tracks along the grooved paper, never for a moment expressing the least impatience or sense of fatigue. The weeks she spent in forming the same letters over and over again were weeks of interest and pleasure to me. With such a gentle, persevering and patient pupil, who would not find teaching a delight?

On the 12th of July she wrote without assistance a correctly spelled and legible letter to one of her cousins; and this was only a little more than a month after her first lesson in chirography. She is very fond of letter-writing and has written several epistles, — which are truly wonderful, when her age and opportunities are considered.

As she had now learned to express her ideas on paper I next taught her the Braille system. She learned it gladly when she discovered that she could herself read what she had written; and this still affords her constant pleasure. For a whole evening she will sit at the table writing whatever comes into her busy brain; and I seldom find any difficulty in reading what she has written.

Her progress in arithmetic has been equally remarkable. She can add and subtract with great rapidity up to the sum of one hundred; and she knows the multiplication tables as far as the *fives*. She was working recently with the number forty when I said to her, "make twos." She replied without waiting to cipher out the sum, "twenty twos make forty." Later I said, "make fifteen threes and count." I wished her to make the groups of threes and supposed she would then have to count them in order to know what number fifteen threes would make. But instantly she spelled the answer, "fifteen threes make forty-five."

She said to me a few days ago, "what is Helen made of?" I replied, "flesh and blood and bone." A little while afterwards I asked her about her dog, "what is Jumbo made of?" After a moment's pause she answered, "flesh and bone and blood." I then turned to her doll and asked, "what is Nancy made of?" Helen was puzzled, but at last she replied slowly, as if in doubt, "straw." Evidently she went through a process of reasoning, and concluded that her doll was not made of the same material as herself and her dog.

On being told that she was white and that one of the servants was black she concluded that all who occupied a similar menial position were of the same hue; and whenever I asked her the color of a servant she would say, "black." When asked the color of some one whose occupation she did not know she seemed bewildered, and finally said, "blue."

Helen takes great pleasure in feeding the domestic animals and in learning their habits and uses. It would puzzle a far wiser person than I am to answer many of her eager questions.

Her power of imitation is strongly developed. Her memory is retentive, and her curiosity insatiable. The relation of things she quickly perceives, — so quickly that she seems sometimes to divine our very thoughts.

By way of illustration I will give a few of the many instances where she has exercised this inexplicable mental power.

She has never been told anything about death or the burial of the body, and yet on entering the cemetery for the first time in her life, with her mother and myself, to look at some flowers, she laid her hand on our eyes and repeatedly spelled, "cry, — cry." Her eyes actually filled with tears. The flowers did not seem to give her pleasure, and she was very quiet while we stayed there.

Her grandmother told Mrs. Keller in Helen's presence that orange peel soaked in wine made a nice flavoring for cake. Mrs. Keller gave Helen the orange peel and showed her how to cut it up and put it into the jar. As soon as Helen had done

this, she went to her mother and spelled, “ wine ” ; nor would she be satisfied until the wine was added to the jar.

One of her dolls was knocked off a table and broken. As we were tired of seeing it lying about, Mrs. Adams said to Mrs. Keller, “ give it to Bessie,” — a little negress on the place. Instantly Helen said, with her fingers, “ Helen will give Bessie doll.”

On another occasion while walking with me she seemed conscious of the presence of her brother, although we were distant from him. She spelled his name repeatedly and started in the direction by which he was coming.

When walking or riding she often gives the names of the people we meet almost as soon as we recognize their presence. Frequently when desirous of making suggestions to her, outside of the routine of her studies or her daily life, she will anticipate me by spelling out the very plan I had in mind.

Of necessity much must be omitted which would be of interest concerning this remarkable child. Her progress so far has been most gratifying. With great patience and perseverance she is constantly adding to her little store of knowledge. Every day finds some new task completed, some fresh obstacle overcome.

This wonderful story narrating, as it does, concisely, but with force and clearness, the simple facts relating to the education of one of the most remarkable children in existence, is full of profound interest, not only to scholars and men of science, but to all thinking persons. Helen's progress will continue to be carefully watched in the future as it has been in the past, and every new development will be faithfully recorded by her devoted teacher.

